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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: DRC: MFA OFFICIALS COMMENT ON SRSG SWING AND ELECTIONS

REF: PARIS 2110 (NOTAL)

Classified By: Political Minister Counselor Josiah Rosenblatt for reason 1.4 (b/d).

1. (C) At a March 29 meeting with Embassy Africa watcher largely devoted to Sudan/Darfur (Reftel), MFA A/S-equivalent for Africa Bruno Joubert and DAS-equivalent Jean-Christophe Belliard offered comments on Amb. Swing's tenure as SRSG (France was very supportive of his efforts) and elections in DRC (need to maintain momentum).

MONUC/Swing

2. (C) The French said they were impressed by Amb. Swing's performance as SRSG and regretted that recent events have clouded his record. They stressed the extremely difficult circumstances prevailing in DRC and how the situation had worsened in recent months, particularly with respect to MONUC's ability to operate effectively. Joubert commented that the current period could be characterized as the end of "MONUC I." Despite MONUC's problems, Amb. Swing "has done well" and "we like his work," said Joubert. Joubert noted the sometimes exaggerated expectations placed on peacekeepers who often lacked motivation and suffered from low morale. Joubert observed that Amb. Swing had received criticism over issues not completely within his control, as had happened to Jacques Klein (referring to similar problems when Klein was head of UNTAES in Croatia). Joubert added that a search for a replacement for Amb. Swing might prove futile -- "we probably can't find anyone better."

DRC Elections

3. (C) Commenting on the issue of elections, Joubert said that, with the failure to meet the elections planned for June 30, it was imperative that the Congolese maintain credible momentum for carrying out a revised election timetable, if for no other reason than to forestall a public backlash. The GDRC had to provide plausible explanations why the June 30 date could not be met and at the same time show that it had a plan for moving the process forward. Joubert thought that the head of the electoral commission, Apolinaire Malu-Malu, was the official who should take the lead in clarifying matters for the Congolese public. Belliard said that one useful step would be for the GDRC to make progress on issuing voter ID cards, as a way of showing progress toward holding elections. If the public did not perceive progress, there could be an "explosion," he cautioned. Joubert and Belliard stressed at several points the need for the GDRC to produce "something tangible" in dealing with a public made skeptical by the impossibility of maintaining the proposed June 30 elections timetable.

4. (C) Joubert and Belliard commented on possible presidential candidates, saying that VP Bemba would run and that VP Ruberwa would not.

5. (C) Asked about French Ambassador Georges Serre, formerly France's "Mr. Africa" in the Jospin government, Joubert replied that, despite having been in Kinshasa for nearly three years, Serre was not moving on.

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